

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL  
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY  
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

**THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL  
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK  
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO**

**INFORMANT: ALEXANDRA FREITAS  
INTERVIEWER: OLGA SPANDAGOS  
DATE: OCTOBER 30, 1985**

**O = OLGA  
A = ALEXANDRA**

**Tape 85.24**

**Tape I, side A**

O: This is October 30, 1985. My name is Olga Spandagos and I'm here to interview Alexandra Freitas.

O: Alexandra where were your parents originally from?

A: [Name unclear] Macedonia, Greece

O: And when did they come here?

A: Ah, my father came here in ah, 1918, and my mother followed I think a year later in 1919.

O: So in other words they were unmarried when they came here. They didn't know each other in Greece.

A: Right. No, they met at the Merrimack Mills in Lowell, Massachusetts.

O: So they were both working in there and they met?

A: Right. (O: Okay. Now...) Um, my father notice my mother. I believe she was a spinner at the time. And he inquired about her and found that ah, she had an uncle that lived here, Mr. Christos (Sponantopulos ). And he had sponsored her. I think that's the only way that she could have arrived here at that time. And he asked about her. And he was interested. And ah, he said that he would like to meet and possibly even marry her.

O: Now he was interested in her because she was also Greek?

A: Oh I think so. And the fact that ah, she was an attractive lady. And ah, from what my father told me years ago, you just couldn't go up to a woman at that time and just say to her you know, "I'd like to take you out, or I would like to see you again." You had to find out who she was, who she was living with, and then you had to see the person that was responsible for her and ask him if it was alright to meet with her.

O: Now is that according to the Greek custom, or was that customary for everyone [unclear]?

A: Ah, no, I ah, I ah understood that to be a Greek custom.

O: You mentioned your mother was sponsored here by your uncle. How did your father um come here?

A: Ah, my father came, they must have had the quota system then, and he came ah, I don't think he was sponsored by anybody. I just think he, he arrived here at the time when they ah, they were allowing so many people that could come in. And he came because he was the oldest child in the family, and because it was ah, ah, they were having very, very difficult times in Greece at the time. And they had heard if you came to America that the streets were lined with gold. And ah, his mother thought where my father was the oldest that he should come here, make some money, and work possibly maybe five, ten years and then got back with all this money he was supposed to have made in America and help out. He had, I think at the time he had a younger brother, two younger brothers and a young sister, and of course in Greece at the time it was very hard for the girls to marry unless they had a very, very substantial dowry. And I think that was the main reason that he came here, was to get money for his sister's wedding, when it would be you know, when she became of age to get married.

O: So in other words, when he came he never intended to stay permanently. He intended to go back?

A: To go back.

O: And um, how....He obviously must of come here by boat right?

A: Right, and if I remember correctly he told me the trip took two weeks to arrive here, and they were really ah, the conditions were diplorable on the boat. He said that they had been, like there was standing room only. They couldn't breath. And um, he was... he came with just a few clothes. And I think he said he had a gold medal with him at the time. Maybe it might of been worth five dollars at the time, and that's all he came with.

O: And did he ever describe to you exactly what the conditions were on the ship, the people he traveled with?

A: Yes, he said that um, most of them were very, very ill and nauseous. And a they all came here, but they didn't seem to have that desire to come here. It's just like they were kind of

forced, or pushed to come to America, to help out the families back in Greece. Nobody was, you know, excited about the trip.

O: And were they mostly Greek people on the ship?

A: Um, I think so. I think he said that he had gone down to um, ah, they had to journey from from Macedonia to Salonika. And from Salonika I think they they were put on some, not a big boat, possibly a boat, and then on to Piraievs. And then I think the boat, I think he said might have stopped in Italy. And then it came to America.

O: Okay, and where did he first land when he got here?

A: Ah, Ellis Island.

O: And what brought him to Lowell?

A: And ah, when he arrived at Ellis Island, I don't think that there was anyone there to meet, meet him, but there were a few other villagers ah, that had come with him that he knew of, and I think they took...they had take a train from New York and came to Lowell. Why they picked Lowell is because there were other immigrants that had arrived earlier, and ah, they had settled in Lowell. And ah, they had mentioned the fact that they had jobs at the Merrimack Mills. And that he felt that if he came to Lowell that he'd have help. Someone would get him to work in the mills.

O: He didn't have relatives, but he knew that there were other Greeks here?

A: Greeks here. I don't think he had any relatives at the time, because he was the only one that came from Greece in his family.

O: But your mother on the other hand did have relatives here?

A: She had this uncle that sponsored her. And um, I guess she lived with these people. Ah, I think Mr. [Sponantopoulos] at the time had been married, and he had a wife and possibly a child at the time when my mother arrived.

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

O: Okay, now Alice, can you tell me how old were your parents when they came here?

A: Ah, my father was eighteen, and ah, I believe my mother was eighteen also, because she came about a year later. They were both about eighteen.

O: And your parents, did they speak English when they first came here?

A: They didn't know a word of English when they arrived.

O: And ah, did they eventually learn English?

A: Ah, my father learned English. In fact he learned to read and write it fairly well, ah, all because after working in the Merrimack Mills possibly few years and he got married to my mother [Emia], he decided to open up a grocery store. Ah, and he catered mainly to the Macedonians. And at that time there was enough of them here in the community to support the store. And ah, because he went into a business he was forced to learn the English language so he could deal with the salesmen, and the workings of a store, you know.

O: And where was that store located? What was the name of it?

A: The first store that he opened up, he opened it up on a Suffolk Street. And ah, it is now a residence. Peter [name unclear] live there now. And what was the store garages now and the apartments are upstairs. After a few years he moved to another location, and that was the corner of Broadway and Suffolk Street. And now it's a Greek Club there now, social club. Later on he moved across the other corner of Broadway and Suffolk, and it is now Michael's Tailor Shop, and that was his last store.

O: And was that mostly a Greek neighborhood back then?

A: Um, I would say when my parents arrived here they settled on Lagrange Street, but at the time it was strictly and Irish community. But as the Greek Immigrants started coming in they kind of pushed out the Irish Immigrants by renting these apartment houses, and that was like Suffolk, Lagrange Street, Adams Street, Marion Street. Actually it's called the Triangle now. So growing up I would say that half that area were ah, of Greek descent. Ah, a few very, very few Irish families remain there while I was growing up. I was born in 1924, and I remember as a child that most of the tenement homes on Lagrange Street, I would say three fourths of them are rented by Greek people. We had a lot of Syrian people that lived there in my neighborhood, a few Polish people, Polish families, maybe one or two Irish families, a few French families. The French families had settled more or less into the Moody Street Area and they considered that where the Textile University is now. Well not the Textile University, its called University of Lowell now. It used to be called the Textile Institute.

O: Lowell Technological Institute.

A: Oh, but we did have a few French people living there. But ah, the majority of them that I remember there were the Greek and the Syrian in the Marion, Lagrange Street, Adam Street area were mainly Syrian people, who were Orthodox. And they had their own church. And they still do have their own church, the St. George, and it's up on Fletcher Street.

O: And did you um, aside from him being in the same neighborhood did you have friends that were Syrian?

A: Ah, we, we were friends, but I, I wouldn't say we were close friends. We, we got to know these people by, mainly when I started going to school and I would have contact with them in

school. And but ah, we didn't really socialize with them at the time. Ah we kept pretty much with the Greek community and the Greek children, we played with them.

O: Were you, did you feel closer to the Syrians than to the French and the Irish, because you mentioned you were the same religion?

A: Same religion. Ah, ah, not really. (O: No) Ah, I felt, I felt more comfortable with my own, my own nationality. The ah, I remember growing up that ah, when I did, when I was in Bartlett School for instance, I do remember that had a few Irish girls I used to chum with at recess, and things like that. And they would always say to us, or say to me, they'd say something to the effect like, "You people look different, you look different than the rest of us." And you know, you could always tell Greek people by their looks, and I didn't think at the time that our facial features were that different than anybody else's, but they would always mention that, "the Greek people have a different look," they'd always say to us. [Unclear] I felt growing up that um, that we were supposed to be lesser than they were for some reason. Like they had been here longer than we have.

O: You mean the Irish and the English?

A: The Irish and the English. Not necessarily the Syrians and the Polish people, because I, I realized at the time that they had probably immigrated here in the states at the same time as our parents. And they used to call us grease balls. I don't know where they got that from, grease balls. I guess from the country Greece. They used to call us grease balls. [Unclear]. The ah, the children of the immigrants I think got along better than the older generation. From what my father tells me, and a lot of the old timers, that a they would use to have some pretty wild fights with the Irish when they first came here. But by the time I grew up to realize what was going on I think the children had kind of mixed in, and we got along I thought fairly well. But then we'd would hear these stories that they would talk about, how the Irish and the Greeks. the Irish felt that the Greeks had come in and taken over the Irish territory. (O: Umhm) And ah, now it's just. It's reversed now. Now it seems that the, they're aren't to many Greeks left in the Acre now, because each woman got educated. They got professional professions and all that. And they finally made money, and they moved out of the Acre. They went into Belvedere, The Highlands, and they bettered themselves. And then I think the... a lot of the Irish came back again. Of course now the area is all... I don't think you could count the Greek families that are in the Acre now. There aren't too many there. Now we have all the ah, mainly the Puerto Ricans that have come into the area now, the new generation.

O: The neighborhood that... Well did you grow up in one neighborhood?

A: I was born on Lagrange Street. I think it was 160, which was the farthest end of the street which bordered Fletcher Street. And then from there, maybe when I was five years old we moved further down the street to 9 Lagrange Street, and I lived there five years. And then we moved next door to 9 Lagrange Street, which was 13 Lagrange Street. So I was born and raised until the age of twenty-one when I got married, and I left Lagrange Street. So I really had one street of my whole existence.

O: And ah, do you remember the house that you lived in, the house you lived in were like?

A: Yes I do remember them. I remember the first one was a six tenement house, and we lived on the third floor. And ah, it was a cold water flat. I doubt that there was any heat at that time. The houses were heated with the central ah, actually our cooking stove that they cooked and heated the house with. And then when we moved to 9 Lagrange Street, we moved to a two apartment house and that was much nicer. And we lived on the first floor. And ah, I think at that house we had hot water. It was called a [Volcan] heater that you would turn on when you needed the hot water, and it would heat up so many gallons. And once you used that up you would have to re-light it again to ah, to get more hot water. And then when I was twelve years old we moved to 13 Lagrange Street. And the landlord had just renovated this apartment. And this was a real big house now. Now we had a living room, and a dining room, and a kitchen, and ah, three bedrooms, which was very unusual because the other houses we had only had the two bedrooms. We were six of us in the family at the time, six children. So although we had the three bedrooms, I still had to share my room with three sisters, with two double bed in a room. So I never had a bedroom to myself while I was, you know, single. My brothers shared one room, my parents shared the other room, and third bedroom for the girls bedroom.

O: So in other words your brother though got like his own room.

A: The two boys!

O: The two boys!

A: Yah, they got their own room right, but they got the smallest room in the house, one bed. My parents' room was average, and ours was the largest room, because it had to accommodate two beds. And we had a bureau, and one closet. And the bureau I remember had three drawers with a mirror on it. And my sister Cynthia had one draw. My sister Dorothy had one draw. And I had to my draw with Pat, my sister who is only fifteen, we're fifteen months apart. She's an older sister, and we had the one closet. And we had to share the closet. And we had it kind of sectioned off, like this part was mine, this is yours, and so forth. Well as you must remember we did not have like twenty-five or thirty pairs of shoes like I might have today. The other day I think I counted my shoes, I think I have more like fifty pairs okay. We had two pairs of shoes. We had one we considered our Sunday shoes, and ah, our every day shoes that we wore to school. And then when Easter came along we'd always get not necessarily a new outfit, but we would get a new pair of shoes. So what was our Sunday shoes became our everyday shoes, and now the new Easter shoes became our Sunday shoes. So we each had two pair of shoes so the closet really only had eight pair of shoes for four members. I guess like I have two closets now full of shoes shoes.

O: That's not enough right?

A: That's not enough. [Laughs] And ah, we had minimum clothes. We had like you know, a coat for church; a good coat for church. And then we probably have a coat to go to school with. The same with the coat. Maybe two, three dresses. Possibly a nightgown that I remember. I don't remember having a lot of nightgowns. I remember like every weekend my mother would...

actually it wasn't a weekend, it was every Monday morning she used to do the wash. And she'd wash that night gown, and then I wore it all week. Actually it was Saturday. Saturday was our bath day. Saturday night was the bath day, and that's when I think she used to wash the underwear, and the clothes. And then we'd have fresh underwear. And then we'd have that nightgown we would wear it all week. And then it got washed again like once a week. They had no washing machines then. She use to soak all her clothes in the tub the night before in cold water, and then the next day they'd put this hot water into the tub, and use to scrub brush, a scrub board and scrub them all up. This house here, when we moved into the third house I remember it didn't have this [Volcan] here they use to call it for hot water. And ah, all the water had to be heated on the stove in the kitchen. So all the houses we went to we never had central heat. It was always a cooking stove that heated the house. Then after a few years the landlord did put in one of those heaters for us, the [Volcan] heaters. And this was a blessing, because now we don't have too you know heat the stove, the water up in the stove.

O: Was the house an old house, or a new house?

A: It was an older home, but he had renovated it. So this again was in the first floor, and it was a very cheery house and very nice. I really, really enjoyed living in this house, because I lived in for well, I think maybe ten years in that house. We were six children, and we all had friends. So my house was like ah, they used to call it like the depot. Everybody would meet there you know. It was never locked.

A: And people were always coming and going. If it wasn't my friends it was my sister's friends.

O: So in other words you didn't have to worry about crime or anything?

A: Crime, we ah, I never, never remember locking the house, you know, when I'd leave. Like whenever you came home you never looked for a key to open up the house. The door was always open. I'm sure that ah, as we got a little older I remember when we would go to bed at night we did lock the door at night. But as a child growing up I never remember ever going home and finding my house locked. It was just always opened.

O: You mentioned your house was a cheery house?

A: Very cheery, bright house, nice big rooms.

O: You had a lot of windows in your house?

A: A lot of windows. I think each bedroom had three, three, three windows each bedroom. The kitchen, we had a very long kitchen. Had one, two, three, five windows in the kitchen; three on this side, and the kitchen was the whole width of the house. It had originally had been two rooms and he had broken down and made one big kitchen out of it. It was kind of a living kitchen. One end of the other house we had it set up like a den you know like with a couch and tables around. And the right-hand side we had the refrigerator, the stove in the kitchen on the left-hand side. But ah, I had very pleasant memories growing up, very happy memories until the year my mother past away. And then it was very sad for awhile. She died in 1938, and I think

she was thirty-nine years when she past away. All from a gallbladder operation that she never endured, and she just passed away. My father was forty at the time.

O: And what was that like when she died? Um, wa there any kind of certain behavior that you had to?

A: Yah it was, it was a very, very sad thing when... I was thirteen years old my brother, and my brother Andrew I remember was ten at the time. And when my mother died my father was notified at, at the store that...she was operated like an a Tuesday. And ah, he went to see her she seemed be all right. And then Wednesday morning he got a call that he should go right away because she was failing. And I think by the time he got to the hospital she had, she had passed away. And I remember all her friends and all the people from the village that knew my mother came to the house right away. And they used to wake the ah, [repeats] they used to wake the ah, person two nights at the time. One night they would wake them at the house, and the second night they would wake them at the a funeral home. And I remember the funeral home at the time. I don't know if it was Pappas' funeral home, but it was on Dummer Street where all of the coffee houses were. Where Demoulas is now, on both sides there were all of these little stores, and coffee houses. I think there might have been, I don't know, forty-five to fifty coffee houses at the time. There was a coffee house for every, every village in Greece you could name. There was a Macedonian one, and there was like a Spartan one. And no matter where a part of Greece you came there was a coffee house, and people would go to their own little coffee houses. And in between this was this funeral home. It could have been Pappas. I'm not sure. I remember the... I think it was the first night it was at the funeral home, and the second night they had the funeral, the wake at the house, and all her friends were there. And I remember they ah, they removed all the furniture from the front room to make room for the casket and chairs, and ah all these ladies would just sit their and ah actually not sing. (O: They'd wail) Like ah, I think they used to call it wailing, right? And ah, they were just making up stories as they went along. I mean it wasn't any particular song or anything, but they would just talk about her, and why did you leave us? And why did you leave your husband? When you left, you left him with the responsibility of six children. And wake up, get up. You have no business being there. And they just kept singing these, actually they, I think the Greeks have a word for them. They're like (O: says word in Greek) [word in Greek] yah, they're called. Right, [word in Greek], yah. (O: Repeats word in Greek) Yah, and they believe that by getting all this grief, and all of this sadness out of you, that it was good for you. I think that was the purpose of these ah, these songs. I used to call them songs. And you just sat there, and whether you wanted to or not you'd sit there and ball, because it was very sad. And then I find out years later that they have some professional wailers like the Irish people I understand. I don't know if they still do it in Ireland, but they used to actually hire these people to come into a home and just do nothing but wail all night. And this is to get the grief out of you. And ah...

**Side A ends**

**Side B begins**

A: The house was full of all her friends and a they would all bring something, food, because they felt that the family was grieving, and they just wouldn't think about food or anything like that. And they would make all these very special foods and they would bring them over. And I



remember that we stayed up all night, and at midnight they covered her face with a silk handkerchief, because now she's supposed to be sleeping. And early in the morning, I believe it was six or seven o'clock, they took off this handkerchief and they proceeded to continue these [Greek word for wailing] until the body was taken to the church, and then on to the funeral. Another thing that really impressed me that always stayed with me was the Greek Orthodox people open up the casket at the church, and the priest you know, reads the last rites or the last sacraments, whatever they are. But then I believe this was the first, you know, funeral that I had witnessed, which was my mother's. And when we went to the cemetery I did not expect that they would open up the casket again just before it was lowered into the ground. And again the casket was opened. And now the priest put the handkerchief on her face again, and he took some dirt from the ground and sprinkled on her, on her chest. And then he took some oil and he dropped it on to the handkerchief. In the meantime it was windy, it was in June, but it was windy. And I remember the handkerchief flying away from my mother's face, and flew away, And the last thing I remember is my mother's face in this casket. And the, and the coffin was semi-recessed into the ground, and he placed the handkerchief back again, closed the casket, and then ... The mourners did not leave at that time. They actually would lower the casket into the ground and then they would throw flowers from the wreaths, or from the bouquets that they had. And then you left. So for a long, long time after that, that scene stayed with me. And then I thought to myself, now that isn't right that they should you know perform it in this manner. Years later they did stop that part of the ceremony at the Edson Cemetery. Actually it was the Westlawn. Ah, they now continue to leave the casket open at the church, but I understand that they're thinking about not having it opened anymore. Once it leaves the funeral home now and they close the casket, they feel that should be the last, you know, farewell or goodbye, instead of at the church, because its a very, very emotional thing to go through. So that was my first experience with a, you know, a death and a funeral. I had not been to one before.

O: And ah, were they restrictions on you and your brothers and sisters after that for awhile, because your mother had died?

A: Our restrictions?

O: Yah, on the way you behaved, or where you could go, and what to do?

A: Oh well, for the next forty days we stayed home. And other than probably going back and forth to school, we weren't allowed to go any where. We'd come straight home. We could not play a radio. Anything that we would derive any pleasure from, we just avoided any thing like that. We couldn't go to a movie, which was usually what we did for recreation then, was a movie. Dancing, any social functions. And what happens is that every night someone would call you up and say they were come over to the house that night, and they would bring a full course meal to your house. I think they use to call it [Greek word]. And they would call up. So for the next forty days every night we were home some family would come with a complete meal and we would all sit down together and eat. Ah I don't hear too much about that lately, about people going to [Greek word]. Have you ever heard of [Greek word]?

O: I don't really know. I haven't had to deal with anything like that yet.

A: You haven't huh?

O: No.

A: Your mother never told you about that, like you know, in, they did this in Crete? And actually this was a custom that they brought from the, from the villages.

O: I'm sure it did happen.

A: They felt that the husband was, and the children were in mourning, and that they needed the strength to face this loss of theirs, and the last thing they could think of is food. So they would come over and bring this food. And that's another thing that really, really impressed me. That, that we would have all of these relatives and friends come over with a complete meal.

O: And how long? That went on for forty days?

A: Forty days.

O: And after forty days were you still restricted?

A: After forty days then we we allowed, you know, to go to a movie and all that, but it took a long time before we even had the desire to do anything like that.

O: Was that because you were children? Were the restrictions of the older people still up to forty days?

A: Oh yah, the older... the older people might have, might have kept the mourning period even longer. Um, I do remember wearing black for at least a year after the, after the death. And when I say black, ah, I mean literally black. Like black stockings, black shoes, everything black, and we would wear black for a year. It was expected of us, but ah I didn't object to it. I didn't mind. Maybe its because somebody told me I looked good in black, looked nice in black. So, but I always liked black.

O: Was that something that other, the other people in the neighborhood, non-Greeks did?

A: Ah, I don't remember. I don't remember that the, that they might have mourned as much as we did. I remember the men. I remember my father wearing a black band around his coat sleeve and it seems to me he wore that for a long time at least forty days if not longer, which is something I haven't seen lately. Have you ever seen somebody with a black band around his coat sleeve?

O: Ah first few days maybe.

A: Well then I remember they use to wear at least forty days. And then I think they use to place a black wreath also on the door. What it was made of I don't remember, but I do remember it was black. The wreath was made out of black, with a black ribbon on it, and that was placed on

your door. That signified that there was a death in that family. Now I think the wreath possibly might of stayed also forty days. And I think the forty days come from, according to the priest, is that the soul or the spirit is supposed to be on earth for forty days before it ascends to heaven. And that is why the mourning period is for forty days.

O: So you remember wearing the black to school as well? (A: Yah) Now what did the other children say to you about wearing black, all black clothes? Did they say anything?

A: No I don't remember any remarks or any... All I remember is that um I was in the eighth grade, and my sister Pat was the ninth at the time. And she was supposed to have graduated that week my mother died, which was June 15. And ah, she never did graduate because the girls used to all wear white at the time of graduation exercises, and I think she had died a few days before graduation. So I remember when I graduated the next year, my sister Pat came to my graduation, and she came to my prom because she had missed her prom.

O: I see.

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

O: Alex, can you tell me a little bit about um, the jobs that your parents had, about your father's shop, and what your mother, what kind of work your mother did?

A: Ah, my mother, after she got married, bore the six children within a space of ten years. And I just remember my mother mainly at home. When we'd come home from school she would always be there, My father had in the meantime left the Merrimack Mills and he opened up his first store that I mentioned earlier. And ah, when we would come home from, lunch time when we would go home from school, the store was just around the corner from where we lived. So we would always go by the store first, and say hi to my father and then go home and have a lunch. Then go by the store again, and see my father again, and back to school. And it was required of us at the time that we would go to Greek School. And the classes were held at the Transfiguration Church, which is the church I belong to. And we went three times a week Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and ah, the classes were from two to six. And oh, we learned ancient history. We had a religious course, and ah ancient history.

O: And language?

A: And language. And ah, that's where I learned to read and write.

A: I learned to speak the Greek language through my parents, because that's all...as a young child I never remember anything but the Greek language. And it wasn't until I went to school, and I believe at the time it was five years old we, we were able to start school in kindergarten, and that is when I learned the English language. And I do remember in school, ah, they would all, not all but a few of the pupils in there would all say to me, "Why do you have, why do you speak the way you do? You people have a funny way, the way you pronounce your words." And ah, to this day I think ah, every so often I get somebody who will say to me, "You have a funny accent you know, where you from?" [Laughs]. So I guess I never really lost it. And I

think this has to do with the fact that you learn the Greek language as a child, and ah, for some reason you never get away from this accent. Greek School I did not enjoy at all. I wasn't a very good pupil, but I did graduate after six years. I got my diploma. [Laughs]

O: Now why was it that you didn't like Greek School?

A: I didn't like it because it was ah... After putting in a full day at the regular school, Bartlett School, right from eight, and then you had your break at eleven thirty, and then you had to go back at one, and then you would get out at three. And you got out at three it was like a hassle to go home and pick up your books, and especially like at this time of year, in the fall and winter. By the time you got to school it was dark and when you came out it was pitch dark. And on cold nights you had to cross that North Common to get back to your house. We had some real cold winters I remember then. And ah, I had a teacher that was very, very strict. And ah, I was never prepared. Like I never had my lessons done on time, and things like that. He would always call on me the nights I never did my homework. And if you didn't do your homework then, you know what would happen? If ah, or if you misbehave in class or whatever, in front of all the other pupils he would make you, he would make you ah, turn your hands with your palm side up. And he had a long, it wasn't a ruler, it was like a kind of a rod, like a flexible rod like. And if you didn't do your homework and you know, he gave you homework to do, you didn't have it ready to pass it in, right in front of the other students he would make you put out your hand, and right where you were sitting he would come up there and he would give you a whack possibly one on each hand. And if you really misbehaved real bad, then you might get two whacks on each hand, sometimes three whacks on each hand [laughing] And!

O: Did you get a lot of whacks [unclear] when you were in school?

A: And I remember getting my share of them to at the time, the whacks, but again is that what they call capital punishment that they've done away with? [Laughs] But I remember one particular boy use to get whacked every single night [laughs]. We always expected it. By the end of the evening he got whacked every night. Sometimes your hands would actually turn red, I remember. That was funny. But I'm happy today, and satisfied today that I was supposed to go there, because otherwise, although I spoke the language I never would have learned to read and write it, which was to my advantage you know, later on in life. Today I get criticized by my four children because I never passed on what I learned, because none of my children understand the Greek language. And as they got older they criticized me for not making them go to school actually, but ah, they still have night... I don't know if they still have night school at the Transfiguration. They still have night school? Oh, that's how far away I got from it. And I think this has to do with the fact that I did not marry a Greek person. I married a Portuguese person, but then all the more reason why. Hello! (Someone in the background saying hello to Alex) All the more reason... Did you shut it off? All the more reason that you should have learned the third language also, which was Portuguese. But we spoke nothing but English at home so.

O: Getting back a little bit about Greek School, was this something your parents would never have even given a second thought to not sending you to Greek School?

A: Yah, it was just understood that you had to go to Greek School, and not only Greek School, but you had to go to Sunday School also.

O: Now what about ...

A: And participate in all the Greek holidays they had. And um, like on name days like Independence Day, we were told that we had to learn poems, and we had to go on stage and recite our poems in front of the parishioners and all that. I found that very, very embarrassing, but they always gave me a poem and they said I had a very nice loud voice. They would all applaud when I got there with my poem.

O: That was for all the holidays?

A: The holidays?

O: Independence Day!

A: Independence Day, Graduation, mainly Graduation Day, but the Christmas holidays we'd always have some kind of function at the church where we were required, we'd have these small little plays, we'd all act our part.

O: What was the regular school like that you went to every single day? What were the differences between that and going to Greek School?

A: Ah, in what respect? Um...

O: Did you feel different once you left the regular school and went to the Greek School?

A: Ah not really! I just didn't like...I think possibly I didn't like the fact it was in the evening and you had just put in a full day of regular school and you just weren't ready to accept another two hours of sitting and doing more homework. That's all it was. I think it had nothing to do with ah... And of course you're talking about now Greek School, you're with your own nationality and you know all the students they were of Greek descent. Where the other schools you got a mixture of people, ah, different.

O: Still though you mentioned before that you had some chums that were Irish, but you didn't socialize with them after school?

A: Not after school. Ah, we all kind of kept to ourselves when we socialized. If we did any, anything after school, school ah, it was to go to possibly a movie, or we'd go roller skating. And it was always with... with me it was mainly with my sisters and friends who again were Greek people. As I got into high school though I do remember that I, I had a very good friend that I chummed with and she ah, was a Polish girl. Her name was Jenny [Ucewicz]. And ah, so I would say my teen years were spent mainly with this Polish girl. And I would socialize a lot with her. I would go to her home. She would come to my house. But other than that particular girl, I don't remember having friends other, outside my, outside the ah, my nationality.

O: And how did you meet all these other friends that you had that were Greek? You know, even though they weren't relatives did you meet them because they lived in your neighborhood, or because [unclear]?

A: Mainly because they lived in my neighborhood. I would say all my friends lived either across the street from me, or next door to me, or down the street from me. It was all in that area. I can name them, Arine and Alie, and Freida and ah, Sophie. They were right in the immediate neighborhood. And ah, and we kind of, it was like a click. And I think even the Irish at the time would kind of stick together. The French would stick together, and you didn't get too much interrelations with other people.

O: How did your parents feel, or your father rather, about bringing non-Greek friends to your house? Did he care? Did he mind?

A: My mother was very strict about, about that, but where she died early and I was still young, my father had a different view on this. He would welcome anyone into the house. He was a very a very outgoing kind of a cosmopolitan person, and he never restricted us from bringing anyone in the home.

O: And um, earlier...

A: Although when I did date it was always usually the Greek boys. And the one time I did not date a Greek person was my husband Joe Freitas. [Chuckles] When I met Joe it was funny cause I never knew, I never knew Portuguese people. They were all up in ah, where were you, up in Back Central Street I think. They were all up in Back Central Street. And I met him at a dance.

O: Was this a Greek dance?

A: No this was at the Commodore. This was the famous Commodore Ballroom. [Her husband says, "That's where everybody met in those days."]

O: That's what I've heard!

A: Ah, but then after I met Joe and he told me he was Portuguese, and I says, "Portuguese." I said, "Where do they come from?" He says, "From Portugal." And then I remember that while I was in High School there were a lot of students in my class that had names like Santos, and ah name some Joe? (Joe: You name them. It's your story.) No, yah, but I can't remember some of the names. (Joe: Good!) I always thought that those people were Italian. If it didn't sound familiar to me, if it didn't sound Irish, and it didn't sound French, and it didn't sound Greek, any other name to me, it didn't sound Polish, any other name to me was Italian. So then after I met Joe, and then I went to a lot of the Portuguese functions, and I saw all these people there that I went to school with, then I realized, oh my God all these people were Portuguese all the time and I thought they were Italian, you know. The only way I had heard of about the Portuguese were in history class when we talk about Magellan, he was Portuguese right? (Joe: I think so) And

who was the other Portuguese explorer? (Joe: Want me to think of a thousand for you? ) No, no just name the ah, most popular ones that you learn in school okay. And that is the only way I knew about Portugal, but I didn't realize there was Portuguese people in this community, you know, in Lowell. (Joe: Much less ball headed) This is being recorded. [Laughs] That's all right. (Joe: You don't actually believe anybody is going to listen to that?) Well, sure they are? They are.

O: No, they are, believe me!

A: So what else should we talk about?

**Interview ends**  
**JW**